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ABSTRACT

The labor market in the Netherlands is characterized by rapid economic and technological development. In response to this, a new approach to career development has been to expand individuals' career competencies. Education, employment policy, non-profit organizations, and corporate life are facing the task of developing career development services that support the individual in becoming more employable. The National Centre for Career Issues identified 14 universal life needs that are the new representation of work. The importance attached by government to career development is demonstrated by a number of initiatives, including the national lifelong learning program, and developments regarding employment services and social security. Government policy regarding developments in employment service and social security is geared towards the less fortunate groups of society. Employment offices in the Netherlands are split between a public and private element. Many organizations, oriented toward the labor market, are interested in the new approach to career development. Some new approaches listed include a theoretical framework for the use of diagnostic tools in career process of job seekers; Renewal Information and Advice Project for job seekers to find information on occupations, training, and work on the Internet; and Agora Project, a digital mediation system. (JDM)

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By

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16. THE NETHERLANDS

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Introduction

Today's labour market is characterized by ever more rapid economic and technological development and by altered views on labour and on employment relationships. Employers make ever greater demands on their (prospective) employees: increased flexibility, enhanced availability and the ability to cope with change. Secondary school pupils, those attending individual courses and students find it is no longer possible to make a one-off choice of profession for the future. Employees, whether or not facing redundancy, those re-entering the labour market and those with a disability are having to consider the possibility of a change in direction. The trends in society are such that at various times in their lives, everybody is confronted with a major career change. Men and women from different cultural backgrounds need to develop the ability to shape their own careers and to make a balanced choice between paid work, caring responsibilities and leisure.

It is no longer sufficient for employees to possess formal qualifications in the shape of diplomas and previous job titles. In addition to vocational skills, ever increasing emphasis is placed on enhanced availability, initiative, motivation, commitment, responsibility and flexibility. Modern workers must anticipate cultural, organizational and technological developments. Today, lifelong learning and employability are the main subjects in career development.

A New Approach to Career Development

In the Netherlands, a theoretical concept has been developed for this, geared to expanding individuals' career competencies and to a new representation of the world of work and occupations.

For many organizations, this theoretical concept will form the starting point for developing products and services in education, and for the labour market. The aim is to achieve a more process-oriented, longitudinal and coherent approach to career development.

Acquisition of a Working Identity Through Creative Social Learning

Education, employment policy, non-profit organizations and corporate life are facing the task of developing career development services that support

the individual in becoming more employable in a changing situation. The services enable the individual to establish a meaningful relationship between education training, work and life development. In this way, the individual can decide on a work orientation and develop a working identity connected to the dynamic of the work order. If this is successful, the uncertainty over role and livelihood can be transformed into a new perspective of the future and new opportunities.

This means that individuals must not only acquire specific career skills (such as the ability to apply successfully for jobs) but must also be able to answer three questions:

- What sort of person am I, with respect to motivation, interests, strengths and weaknesses?

- Given my qualities, in what area of work can I make a meaningful contribution to society?

- In what type of vocational role can I establish a meaningful exchange with others?

The first question relates to personal identity. The second relates to the capacity to determine a course at school or the world of work. The third question is about developing a working identity.

In the new approach, the relationship between a person and work is seen as a process involving ongoing interaction between the individual and society. Emphasis is increasingly being placed on stimulating:
- an internal dialogue about personal life experience; and
- an external dialogue about society's value systems, which are at the root of processes of change on the labour market.

This is necessary because traditions are becoming ever weaker and individualization is increasing with individuals having to find their own direction. By means of the internal and external dialogues, the individual sheds light on the development of her/his own values with respect to education, work and career. By reflecting on their own life experience, people acquire a feeling of direction in life and a sense of identity. This process of reflection is also referred to as creative social learning, and is different from the reproductive learning process that still predominates in our society.

In the first place, the internal dialogue is geared to the experience acquired to date. In order to define ways in which an individual can be significant, that person must first gain insight into her/his life theme: the answer to the question "what sort of person am I?" (a completely different question from

"who am I?"). The answer can be found by seeking a pattern in experiences that have attracted the individual's attention: "As far as I can remember, what attracts my attention?" The life theme differs from the "self-concept" in two ways. First, it does not concentrate attention on the images an individual has of her/himself; the focus is on the life experience he/she has had to date. This forces both the person and the counsellor to concentrate on the conscious progress of the social learning process that leads to the development of a self-concept. Second, it concentrates attention on the cognitive as well as the emotional aspect of development of a self-concept. A self-concept is primarily cognitive; a life theme is cognitive and emotional, and concentrates attention on the evolving value system. In other words, the discovery of the life theme can be seen as an activating way of clarifying the self-concept, because it renders visible the "leitmotif" — the continuity running through the various self-concepts (the sub-identities) the individual has. Life themes take a central place in the individual's experience and are enduring. Therefore, they offer a good starting point for making life experience comprehensible and for going on to process the interpreted experiences into a life story. This is not so much about finding an answer to the question "who am I?" but rather to the question "what sort of person am I in relation to others?" The answer to this question indicates which "value areas" are most important to a person.

In the external dialogue, this theme is related to the world of work and working. It is a question not of "what do I want to be?" but of "what sort of work suits the sort of person I am?" In order to find an answer, work has to be presented as an attempt to fulfil human needs. However, this is not really possible if work is described in terms of qualifications for training and occupations, as is usually the case. The life theme is a basis for forming a working identity. Via the life theme, the individual can indicate which broader social or societal "life needs" he/she is interested in, and what contribution he/she can, or would like to, make to them. If "work" is presented as a function of the satisfaction of universal life needs, it becomes possible for the individual to establish a link between her/his life theme and the world of work.

A New Representation of Work

The National Centre for Career Issues (LDC) identified 14 such universal life needs (including food and luxury goods, clothing, upbringing and education). Ordering life needs provides a simple, clear classification in 14 sectors of work which can be used in determining a course through work. This classification is not tied to time and culture.

In every sector of work, there is a fixed work distribution into eight so-called work types (including research and development, production, inspection, logistics). In this classification, the ninth type of work is "self-employment." The content of the types of work is continuously changing,

but the work types themselves remain unaffected by all the dynamic changes. Placing the sectors of work on a horizontal axis and the work types on a vertical axis yields a matrix representing the world of work (Appendix 1). An individual can use the matrix to find out which field(s) of work is (are) most attractive to her/him, given the "type of person" he/she is. Subsequently, the individual can ask which type of work ties in most closely with her/his interests and capacities. In this way, the individual is able to demarcate a personal work space that offers the certainty of continuity in time and space. Personal motivation, interests and capacities can, in principle, be fulfilled, in this space. However, in this personal work space, no account has yet been taken of the rapid changes taking place in sectors of work. The individual will have to consider these too, without losing sight of the value-related perspective.

The satisfaction of life needs is a constant working challenge for society, which is under permanent redefinition in public discussion. Three sub-discussions can be identified.

- **The scientific discussion.** New knowledge is introduced to provide for life needs in new ways.

- **The political discussion.** Which new scientific options are worthwhile and correct?

- **The economic discussion.** On the basis of the first two discussions, what can be implemented in practice, in economic terms?

For individuals to reach a conclusion about whether and how they can make a worthwhile contribution to the process of labour in their preferred sector of work, it is necessary to provide them with information about the influence of these three discussion areas on the demand for labour within the working sectors they have selected. The starting point is the so-called *core dilemmas* in a specific career field. Core dilemmas result from the failure (as yet) to harmonize the three discussions (the what, why and how questions) and from shortcomings in specific definitions of the task of labour. For the professional practitioner in daily practice, they produce problems of choice for which (as yet) no unequivocal answers are available. Confrontation with a core dilemma forces the individual to examine the scientific, political and economic determining factors of the process of change in the selected sector of work, and to take up a personal position in these discussions, as relevant to the area of work.

In short, the advantages of the concept of "perspectives on work" are:

- People can acquire an overview of the world of work and occupations in a fairly simple way.

- It is not necessary to know all the individual and continuously changing occupations and functions.

- Meaningful and motivational links can be created with other new possibilities.

- The choice can be adapted to meet the client's wishes or requirements.

- The focus on a specific job is broadened to a focus on (various) sectors of work.

- The classification provides an opportunity to make predictions about changing or disappearing occupations and may include occupations from other cultures.

- Interests, qualifications and capabilities are linked to meaningful sectors of work.

- Depending on the objective and the target group, one can opt for a more textual or more visual representation in a written (or interactive) electronic product.

A Powerful Learning Environment

A career development service must be organized in such a way that it offers the individual a so-called powerful learning environment. This is a learning environment which:

- as far as possible, matches the situations and circumstances in which the acquired knowledge should be used or applied (at a later stage) and creates links with the world of work and occupations;
- invites the individual to be active, and motivates and promotes pleasure in learning, by increasingly making the person responsible for her/his own learning; and
- in addition to cognitive learning, also facilitates affective learning, by including role models, providing coaching and being geared to interaction.

Career Development and the Role of the Government

As in most other Western European countries, the relationship between central government and society has also changed in the Netherlands. Government policy is based on a number of developments: a shift from regulation to deregulation, from centralization to decentralization, from funding supply to funding demand. The idea behind this development is that central government should limit itself to policy development, while implementation of policy is left to regional and local authorities and

bodies, and to non-governmental organizations. A development of this kind regularly creates a lack of clarity in terms of the extent to which the government still needs to control policy implementation and promote the quality of the desired results. This new position also creates a somewhat paradoxical situation in respect of career development. On the one hand, career development is on the policy agenda of many ministries; on the other hand, government is increasingly adopting a hands off approach to translation of government policy into practice.

The importance attached by government to career development is demonstrated by a number of initiatives:

- the national "lifelong learning" action program;
- the policy regarding the major cities in the Netherlands;
- developments regarding secondary education; and
- developments regarding employment service and social security.

The National "Lifelong Learning" Action Program

The "lifelong learning" program arose out of a nation-wide debate on knowledge initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science on the knowledge and skills that will be needed in the future. The action program was developed under the leadership of a ministerial committee chaired by the minister president. The committee members were the ministers of Economic Affairs, Social Affairs, Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, and Education, Culture and Science, and the Secretary of State for Education, Culture and Science.

The program has economic goals, but is also socially significant. It can be the connecting link that offers people an opportunity to make themselves as well equipped as possible, both at work and in other areas, at different stages of their lives. Key points are:

- individuals managing their own employability;
- preventing educational disadvantages;
- educational innovation;
- professionalism of schools; and
- employability of teachers.

As a starting point, the business community is responsible for investing in the employability of workers. Government assumes responsibility for impetus in other areas, via incentive measures.

The Policy Regarding the Major Cities in the Netherlands

The current government has appointed the Minister of Major Cities and Integration Policy. Now that the Netherlands has become a country of immigration, policy needs to be increasingly geared to the integration of ethnic groups. Policy and integration are an intensification of the general government policy of maintenance and development of a democratic

society, in which individuals can develop their talents. In conjunction with integration policy, major cities policy will, among other things, be geared to four action programs:

- young people from ethnic groups;
- combatting unemployment;
- preventing and combating prejudice, discrimination and racism; and
- communication.

Career development plays a greater or lesser part in all the action programs. More specifically, the action programs involve giving thought to the following:

- organization of a comprehensive development program from birth to 18 years of age, including self-help organization, a policy on educational disadvantages, student counselling, a program for early school leavers, etc.;
- improved matching of supply and demand at corporate level, an influx of ethnic groups into important functions, new arrivals and their entry into the labour market;
- education, work; and
- creation of an image of integration, exchange of knowledge between "partners in integration."

Developments Regarding Secondary Education

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the following basic principles have characterized education policy:

- The human capital factor is regarded as extremely important.
- There are attempts to increase educational output.
- Careers education has become an important issue.

As a result, careers education and guidance (CEG) has been mandatory in secondary education in the Netherlands since 1993. In 1991, the Ministry of Education and Sciences announced the preparation of legislation as part of a nation-wide reform in education for 12 to 18 year olds. In 1996, the Ministry emphasized the importance of careers education and guidance in secondary education and provided guidelines on the content, responsibilities of the school and responsibilities of external services.

From the content point of view, CEG means students get careers support for:

- the learning and application of decision-making skills;
- obtaining and being able to apply information (e.g., on career opportunities, labour market perspectives and the combination of labour and caring); and

- obtaining insights into their own capacities.

The goal is to learn the answer to the three questions mentioned above.

CEG is considered a responsibility of every school. The subject teacher, the class tutor, counsellor and careers teachers have their complementary responsibilities. The Ministry thinks it is desirable that the school management should develop a vision and policy on the organization of CEG in the school, but does not prescribe how CEG should be provided. It has published quality indicators for CEG to improve communication and to ensure value for money from schools for the public funding they get to spend on CEG. This money should be spent with local external career services. As of 2000, schools will be free to spend it as they wish. The external services, both locally and nationally, are encouraged to harmonize their activities.

Although there are no regulations for the school as a whole, the law requires subject teachers to make a contribution. In basic education (for 12 to 14 year olds) every subject needs to teach six general skills, of which two concern CEG:

- Students are able, in relevant situations, to relate the subject to the practice of several occupations.

- Students become aware of their own possibilities and interests, which will be important when choosing further courses. They obtain some insights into the meaning of every subject in further studies and occupations.

Following these legal prescriptions, there are similar attainment targets in the examinations of the further secondary education as of 1998 or 2000.

In 2000, in pre-vocational and junior general secondary education (both lasting for two years after basic education), one of the six general educational objectives for all subjects will be learning to reflect on the future. Students learn, by reflecting on their own cognitive and emotional functioning, to get insights into their own future possibilities and interests.

With that, explicit attention will be given to:
- making an inventory of their own possibilities and interests;
- researching the possibilities for further study;
- getting insights into occupations, the practice of occupations and current developments in this; and
- the role and importance of knowledge, insights and skills learned at school for life in society (i.e., daily life, leisure time, voluntary work).

From 1998, the CEG objectives for every subject in pre-university education and senior general secondary education (four or three years following basic education) are:

- Students have made inquiries about the further studies and occupations in which the subject plays a part.

- Students have examined their personal capacities and skills regarding attitude to studying and the interests desired or needed for the optional further studies.

Since 1991, the policy of the Ministry of Education has been geared to bringing further education into line with the changes in society. Education is:

- becoming more student oriented;
- encouraging active learning on the part of students; and
- linking the education offered to the world of work.

A key part is played by development of the students' identity via reflection on experiences within and outside school. Students learn to handle their (student) careers and are guided on this throughout their years at school in a consistent and coherent manner. The most important changes include:

- Career development is receiving attention in individual subjects.

- More officials in the school are involved.

- The school management should develop a vision and policy on an integrated CEG.

- Organization and content are often co-ordinated in continued education activities.

Stimulating a powerful learning environment

The Ministry initiated national process management for the nation-wide reform of secondary education. As a result of an evaluation of the new CEG approach in secondary education, in 1996, the Ministry asked those looking after the process management to produce a plan of action for 1996-2000 in collaboration with the National Centre for Career Issues (LDC). The goal is to stimulate the further integration of CEG in secondary education via a range of activities that promote *a powerful learning environment*. The LDC will implement the plan over four years. The activities are intended to:

- provide an impetus in terms of content to the new approach to career development and to facilitate integration into the primary process, especially into the subjects; and
- achieve greater cohesion between the activities of players outside schools (career development services, teaching centres, publishers, syllabus designers, etc.).

The activities in the plan are geared to four themes:
- student orientation;
- career development in school subjects;
- career development in school policy; and
- increasing expertise of subject teachers, class tutors, career teachers, counsellors and management.

Examples of projects include curriculum development for career development in subjects, promotion of the expertise of current and future teachers, and research into the information needs of students.

Developments Regarding Employment Service and Social Security
Government policy with respect to employment service and social security is to provide support for the weaker groups in society, in particular. Therefore, large elements of these fields are being privatized. The government remains active in the public element. In the old system, manpower services and social security were organized via tax levies. Reintegration of job seekers is becoming central to social security implementation. In the new system, companies are responsible for the reintegration of their employees and for part of social security insurance. The aim is to administer the money for reintegration and social security more efficiently and to encourage prevention via employers. The government now simply provides a framework and encouragement via incentive programs (lifelong learning) and monitoring.

What this means for public employment offices in the Netherlands is that they are going to be split into a public element and a private element: the Centres for Work and Incomes, and the Reintegration Company. The public element is responsible for social services and placement for those who are not eligible for private placement. People who need placement go to the Reintegration Company and then return to the labour market. The local authority provides funding. In addition to funding from the public element for employment services, the reintegration company will have to draw on funds from the market. This market is shared with existing organizations in the private sector (temporary employment agencies, private career advice companies, outplacement companies and mobility centres) and with strategic alliances between income insurers and employee insurance executive bodies. These form a chain — from prevention and care for sick workers to reintegration, from welfare

intervention to payment provision. With these strategic alliances, temporary employment agencies are often involved in the actual move toward flexible working.

Examples

Many organizations oriented toward the labour market are interested in the new approach to career development. In the projects below, from the National Employment Service, this new approach forms the starting point for the products and services to be developed.

- **Theoretical framework for the use of diagnostic tools in the career process of job seekers.** The framework forms a reference point for the use of diagnostic tools, in the widest sense of the word, on behalf of target groups distinguished by the Career Services Board, with the common characteristic that they are geared to labour.

  To start, the process the job seeker undergoes in orienting her/himself toward, and obtaining a job, can act as a mediator between the question formulated by the job seeker (client) and the use of funds by the Career Services Board. If this relationship can be formulated soundly, an effective and efficient service can be provided.

- **Renewal Information and Advice (RIA).** In the RIA project, the information and advisory functions acquire a prominent place in services for job seekers. The aim is for every job seeker to be able to find information on occupations, training, work, the labour market and vacancies, and apply for jobs, on her/his own accord, at any time, at home, on the Internet or at the employment office. This involves a national uniform standard, so the information is presented in the same way everywhere. The work on designing, structuring and maintaining the information on occupations, training and the labour market is being done in conjunction with the LDC and other organizations.

- **Agora.** In the Agora project, a digital mediation system is being developed. The aim is to register job seekers and vacancies via a fixed list of jobs and occupations. The unique feature is that each occupation is described in a set of variables with respect to work organization, occupational requirements and working conditions.

Appendix 1: A New Representation of Work

Sectors of Work

1 Food
2 Housing and buildings
3 Clothing
4 Health and care
5 Natural environment
6 Energy and raw materials
7 Equipment and tools
8 Transport infrastructure
9 Information and communication
10 Education
11 Public administration, law and security
12 Arts, culture, religion and science
13 Economics and employment activities
14 Tourism and leisure

Type of Activities

1 Research and development
2 Production
3 Control
4 Logistics
5 Public relations, marketing and sales
6 Human resource management
7 Accounting and clerical work
8 Management and strategic policy